VENTURA COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY *QUARTERLY*

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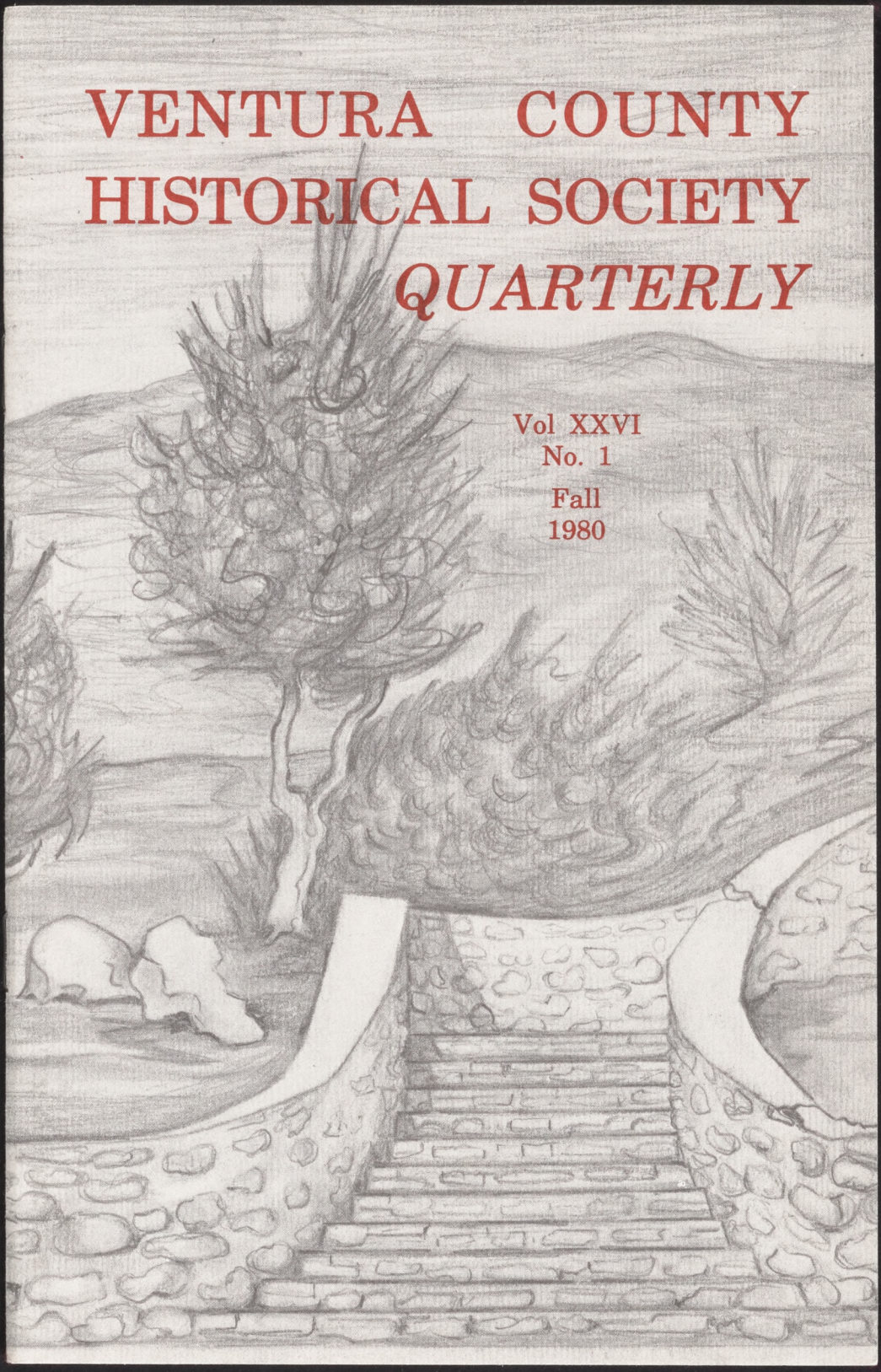
Fall
1980



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The
Ventura County Historical Society
Quarterly

Grant W. Heil, Editor

Vol. XXVI, No. 1 Fall 1980

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Notice

Herbert F. Ricard was the former Historical Librarian. The pictures are from the Ventura County Historical Museum and James Fulkerson.

Msgr. Weber is Archivist of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Los Angeles and Pastor of San Buenaventura Mission. The bracketed material is in addition. The maps were supplied by the Ventura County Mapping and Surveying; the record shots are from the Ventura City Clerk's Office; and Christine Dawn Bush photographed the scenic views.

Pres. Harrison on observation car with Congressman Vandever

PRESIDENTIAL VISITS TO VENTURA COUNTY

By

Herbert F. Ricard

The visits of Presidents Nixon and Kennedy to Ventura County in the 1960's were in keeping with an old practice that goes back as far as George Washington. The Father of His Country toured through the nation, as it then existed, to observe in person the condition of the country and to learn at first hand how the people felt regarding various matters. Other presidents, in their tours, have visited Ventura County.[1]

The earliest known such visit was on April 24, 1891 when President Benjamin Harrison came in a four car special train. He reached Santa Paula about 2:30 p.m., where a large and enthusiastic crowd appeared at the depot. Samples of the county's beans were presented and also a miniature oil rig executed in various colored roses. After a few words from the rear platform, the party proceeded on to Ventura. President Harrison arrived at 3:20 p.m. to a crowd of over three thousand who had come to see a real, live president. This immense turnout was larger than had ever been gathered in the history of Ventura.

Ventura's Reception to President Harrison.

The informal reception tendered President Harrison by the citizens of Ventura at the depot, yesterday, was very creditable in every detail. At least three thousand people, young and old, were present, many of whom were from the country. The school children, numbering several hundred, carrying boquets and banners, lead by Superintendent Black, and marshaled by their respective teachers, comprised one of the most interesting features of the gathering. Company D, commanded by Lieutenants Browne, Hammons and Stone, was also out in full force and presented an excellent appearance. Our band was also there and regaled the crowd with good music, at intervals, while it patiently awaited the coming of the Presidential train.

The latter finally arrived, drawn by a handsome engine beautifully and artistically ornamented with rare and fragrant flowers. It no sooner stopped than President Harrison, whose features have been made so familar to the American public by the pictorial papers, stepped out, with a number of his suite, on the platform of the rear car. His appearance was greeted with enthusiastic applause and many rushed up to receive a hand shake from the distinguished chief officer of the government, and as many as possible were made happy by that mark of favor. Among the hand shakers were a number of little ones, whose boast it will doubtless be in after life, that they had once enjoyed the felicity of shaking the digits of a live President of this great American Republic.

The President was introduced to the assemblage by General Vandever. He said he had not time to make a speech and had no voice left to do so if he had the time. He cordially thanked the people for their kindly demonstration, in a few well chosen words and excused himself from further talk. He stood, with others of his party, on the platform as the train moved off amid cheers and a shower of boquets, flung at him by the army of school children which aligned the track.

Mr. Harrison is a plain, solid intelligent looking citizen, and his personal appearance made a favorable impression on the minds of all present. Secretaries Wanamaker and Rusk were also on the platform, and came in for a share of public inspection; and judging from the number of smiles and pantomimic hand shakes Wanamaker threw promiscuously around, one would almost be lead to believe that that thrifty statesman had fallen into the error of believing that himself was the central object of the entire ovation, instead of Harrison. A call was made for Mrs. Harrison, but she declined to put in an appearance and many expressed disappointment at their failure to feast their eyes on the graceful form of the first "lady in the land."

The committee on reception, owing to an interesting chapter of aggravating circumstances and misunderstandings, measurably failed to connect, and but few followed the Presidential train to Santa Barbara in consequence. The Santa Barbara committee arrived here in the forenoon on a special, and we presume they got back by the same means, but as the reception business was seemingly rather badly bungled all the way through, from all sides, we shall drop the blanket of privacy over its memory and the subject too. 2

Procession at California and Main Streets

At that time the city's population was only 2,320 and the county's was 10,071. The stop here was very brief, planned for 10 minutes, during which the president said a few words from the rear platform.

William McKinley, the second president to reach Ventura, came on May 10, 1901. His eight car special train stopped for 10 minutes at Santa Paula. The president spoke from the rear platform to a crowd of three thousand, many from the eastern part of the county. The depot was decorated and an archway was covered with flowers and the word WELCOME.

Ventura was allotted one hour for a program which consisted of a tour of the town and, of course, a talk by the president. The residences and businesses along the route were finely decorated, and the depot was transformed for the occasion from its dingy appearance to the most elaborately decorated building in Ventura. The masterpiece was a floral arch on Main between Fir and Ash Streets that was 25 feet high and

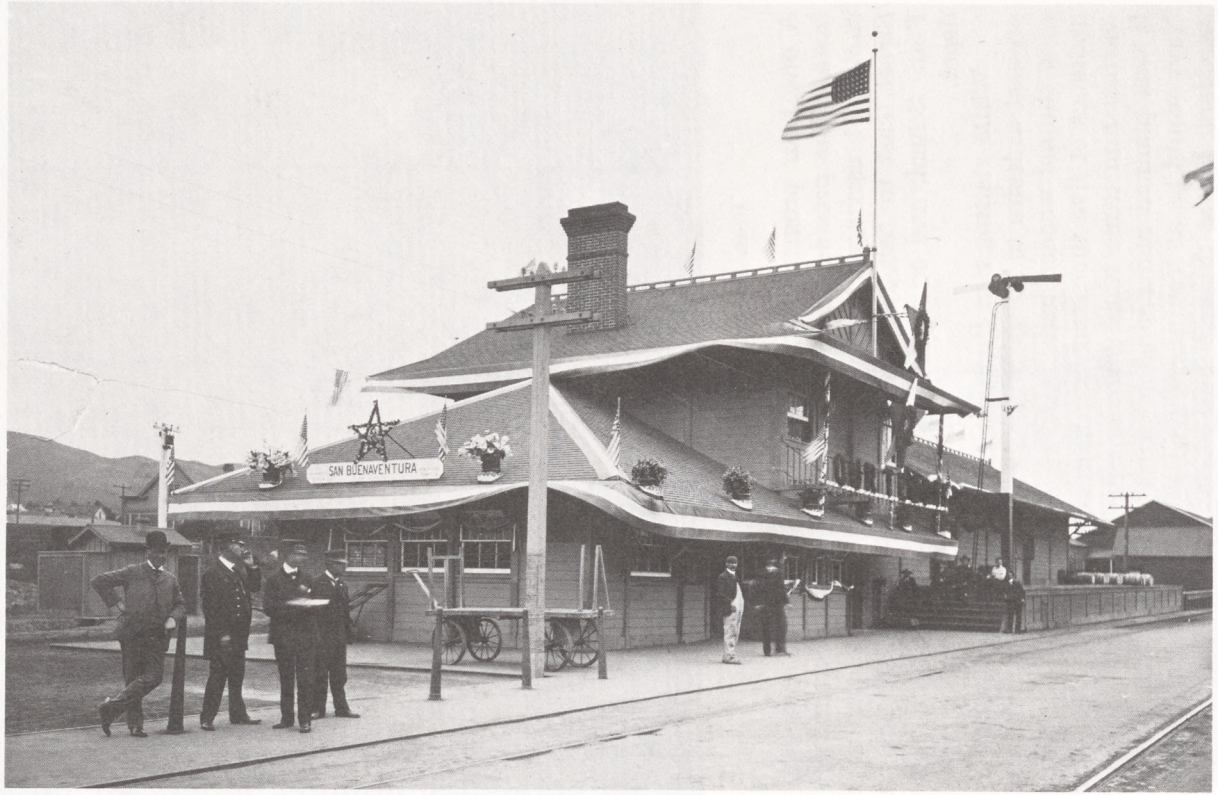
Pres. McKinley speaks at Plaza School

18 feet across between the pillars. It was covered with pepper leaves and more than 10 thousand calla lilies.

Seventeen carriages were in the procession to carry the honored guests and members of the reception committee through the town. They travelled from the depot along Main Street to San Buenaventura Mission which the president entered and was shown through by the Rev. Patrick J. Grogan, along Poli Street for a view of the ocean, then down to Plaza School where he spoke to the throng, then back to the depot. The *Weekly Free press* had a supplement in its next issue showing about 10 or 12 views of this occasion.

Theodore Roosevelt, the next presidential visitor, came on May 9, 1903 which was two years almost to the day, after McKinley. The special train stopped first at Oxnard for 10 minutes while the president made a rear platform appearance and said a few words to the crowd.

When the train arrived at Ventura, there was a brief delay before Roosevelt appeared because he was still eating breakfast.



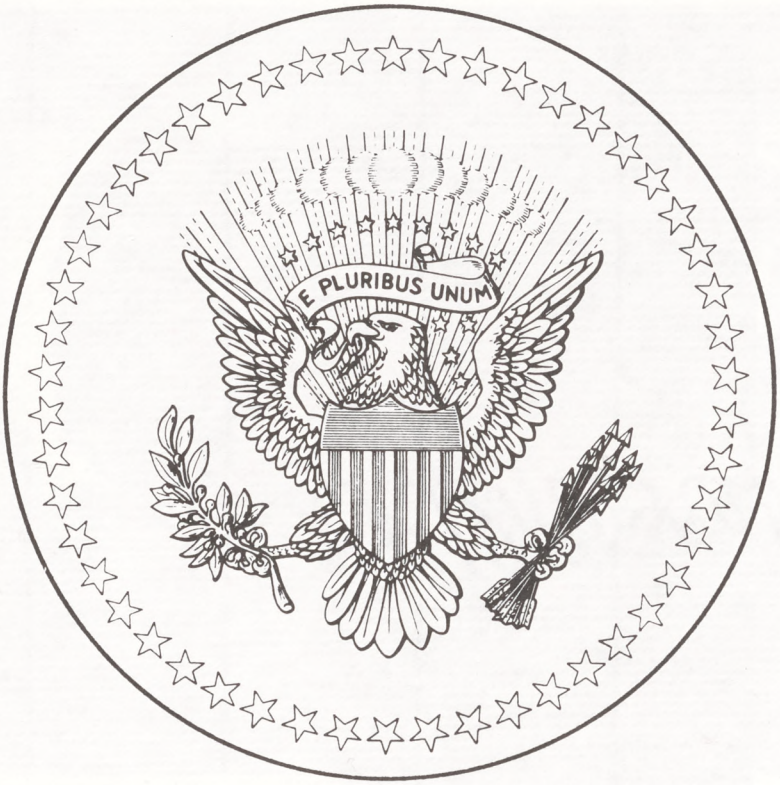
Southern Pacific depot decorated for Pres. TR Roosevelt

Pres. Roosevelt speaks at Plaza School

A one hour program was planned that included a tour of the town. The presidential party and the reception committee occupied 11 carriages that went from the depot to Santa Clara Street, east to Ash, on Main to the mission, on Poli to Fir to Plaza School, and on Santa Clara and Kalorama Streets to the depot.

While visiting San Buenaventura Mission, the president expressed a desire to go up in the bell tower; so he went up and rang the old wooden bells. At the Plaza School he spoke to an audience of five thousand for 16 minutes although his advisors warned him three times that he was running behind schedule. It was planned and approved that the Pacific Squadron of our Navy would be at Ventura to participate in the welcome to the president, but at the last minute a problem of logistics made it impossible for the warships to appear.

Pres. Theodore Roosevelt leaving Ventura



Symbol of the president

The next three presidential visits are not authenticated. It has been stated that Woodrow Wilson once waved to the crowd from the back of a train, and that Franklin Delano Roosevelt went through under wartime secrecy conditions. Harry Truman is supposed to have spoken at Santa Barbara from the back of a train; if so, that train must have passed through Ventura.

President John F. Kennedy came on June 7, 1963. He arrived in a Marine Corps helicopter at Point Mugu. The gates were opened for this occasion and thousands came to greet their president. He spoke briefly through a microphone that was too low for him, and shook hands with those he could. After 22 minutes Kennedy left in the presidential jet. The *Star-Free press* "Magazine" on the following day had a souvenir with pages of pictures that relate to the visit.

President Richard M. Nixon landed at Point Mugu on March 21, 1969 for a helicopter inspection of the flood damage and of the offshore oil leak. He gave a greeting to the marines who were present, then took off after a stop of 17 minutes. The public was not admitted to Point Mugu for this occasion because of the brevity of the visit.

Two of the three presidents who came to our county were assassinated a short time later: McKinley after four months and Kennedy after five months. In this connection, the guarding of these presidents was commented on in the newspapers at the time. The accounts of McKinley's visit seemed to stress the careful guarding being given to him. Of Kennedy's, one account said, "Secret service agents formed a human chain around the president as he walked into the throng shaking hands with anyone who could get to him."

FOOTNOTES

1. On the 14th of April, President Harrison with a party left Washington for a trip to the far West. "Monthly record of current events" in the June 1891 *Harper's new monthly magazine;* v. 83, #493, p. 156.
2. *Democrat,* April 25, 1891.

Cemetery Park

EULOGY FOR A COUNTRY GRAVEYARD

By

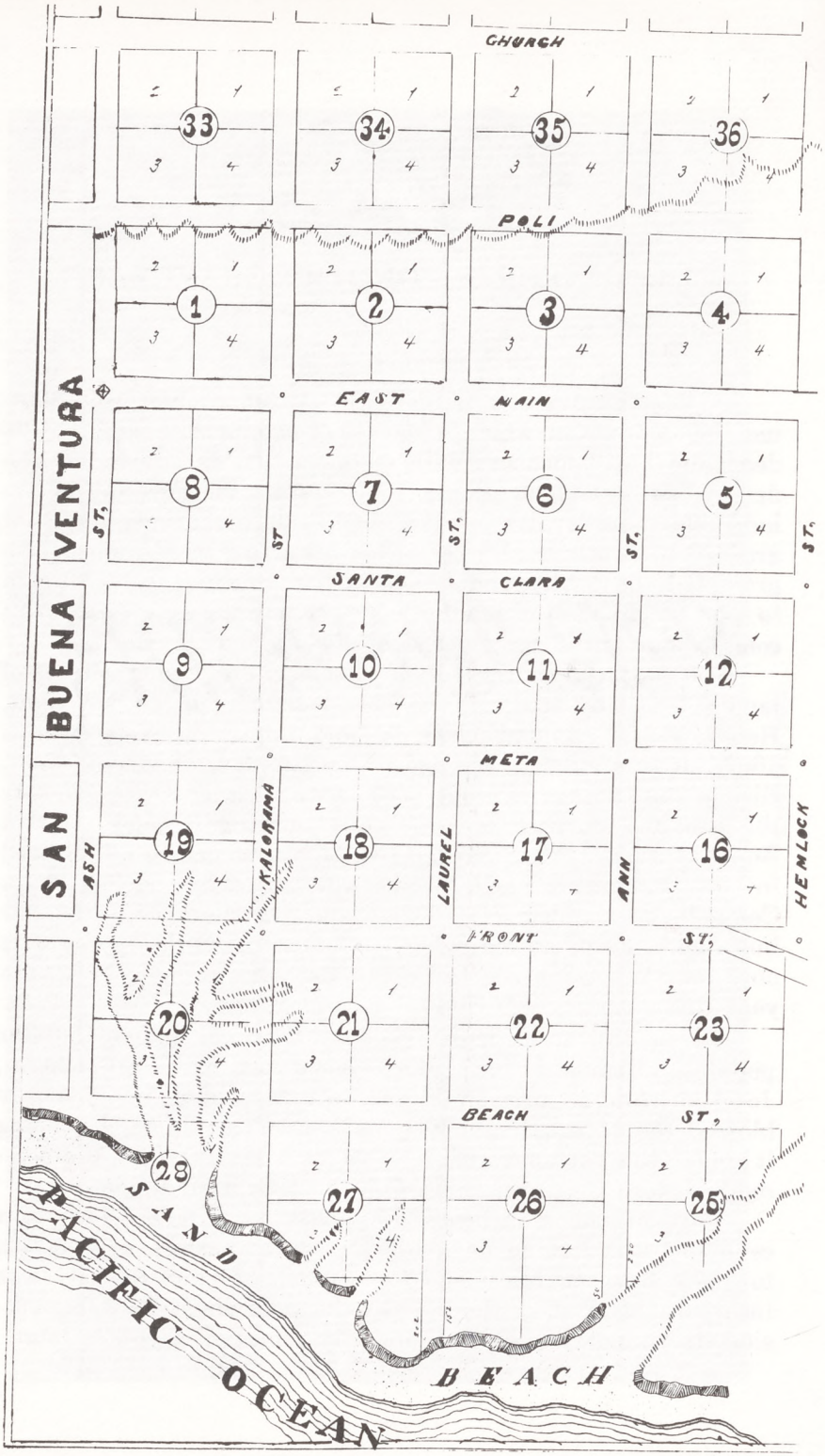
Msgr. Francis J. Weber

Just a century ago William E. Gladstone observed, "Show me the manner in which a nation or community cares for its dead and I will measure with mathematical exactness the tender sympathies of its people, their respect for the laws of the land and their loyalty to high ideals." The sentiments of that great British prime minister, if not his actual words, must have prompted the pastor and people of San Buenaventura Mission to look for a parcel of land on which to develop a new and more commodious burial ground for the historic old church.

The property for the parish cemetery, comprising a tract of land 400 feet by 400 feet, was acquired from George S. Wright, Henry Webb, Edmund L. Gould and Daniel C. Waterman in 1862. It was officially deeded to the Rt. Rev. Thaddeus Amat, Bishop the Diocese of Monterey-Los Angeles, on October 3 "for the use and purpose of a Catholic Burying Ground" at San Buenaventura.[1] Ynez Sanches was the first one to be interred in the "cementerio nuevo." She was buried by the Rev. Juan Comapla on October 21, 1862 in the grave purchased by her husband.[2] From an old subscription list, it would appear that only four lots were sold to Roman Catholics prior to 1882, the year the cemetery was divided into blocks.[3]

Responding to an invitation from the local Roman Catholic populace, Bishop Francis Mora dispatched his Vicar-General, Joachim Adam, to San Buenaventura where he solemnly blessed the parochial cemetery on September 28, 1884, placing it under the patronage of Saint Mary.[4] Assisting at the ceremonies were the Revs. Juan Pujol and Cyprian Rubio.

Part of the Rancho Ex-Mission, the San Buenaventura cemetery was located on a hillside at the eastern edge of the townsite between Main and Poli Streets. When the city was incorporated in 1866, the burial plots were about 2000 feet outside its boundaries; an oversite only remedied a decade later.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META
FRONT ST.
BEACH ST.
SAN VENTURA
BUENA
ASH ST.
KALORAMA ST.
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SAND
PACIFIC OCEAN
BEACH

I hereby certify that in making this survey of the addition to the Town of San Buena Ventura I commenced at the Initial point as established by Geo. E. Thompson in his survey of the Town proper and ran therefrom the course and distances given on the official map of said Town as accepted approved by the Board of Town Trustees of the Town of San Buena Ventura Sept 25th 1869 to the intersection of the center lines of Miramar and Ash Streets at a point indicated on this map thus ⊕ From this point I proceeded the lines as per order of the Board of Town trustees, carrying out the same system as was used in the survey of the original Town by Thompson measuring the feet for each block except the fractional ones and 60 feet through Street except East and New Main Street which I established 80 feet wide. The course of the Streets being North & South East & West except those marked as indicated on this Map

John T. Stow Town Surveyor

In 1870 the San Buenaventura Commercial, Manufacturing and Mining Company, which owned most of the acreage in the original mission grant, deeded an adjacent section of property to the First Presbyterian Church for a "public" cemetery. [Although its Board of Trustees on October 28, 1876 "decided to grant to the Hebrew Society that of the graveyard east of the barranca (these appearing to be a debt of the Society)"[5] it was 1895 before a Jewish Cemetery was subdeeded to "L. Cerf, A. Bernheim, L. Hayfield, T. Wineman, all Trustees of the Jewish Church: Blocks nos. 2, 3, 4, 5, 42, 43, 44 and Lots nos. 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12 north of Block 2."[6] There may have been other ethnic sections since the Chinese names cluster close to Main Street. Although they set up a treasurer for the cemetery, the Presbyterians settled all claims against the account on October 1, 1878.][7] The City of San Buenaventura acquired the deed to these areas of the burial grounds in 1889.

[According to Austin Perley, Head of Ventura City Parks, the first caretaker was Joseph Richardson whose business and home were at the corner of Main and California Streets. De Moss Wilkin, a gardener, was next. In the end Frank Roby looked after those lots he was paid for; he was later hired by the city parks department, working two days of each week at the cemetery. The cobblestone retaining wall was built in 1934 on a WPA project. The two stones were engraved by a Myers of Ernie Frost's monument works.

The *Ventura city and county directories* list: J. M. Findley as sexton in 1910-11; L. T. Burdin in 1912-13; P. C. Kirkpatrick and Mrs. M. S. Burdin in 1914-15; F. H. Roby and Mrs. M. S. Burdin in 1916-17; and F. H. Roby in 1921-22.[8]

An item in the *Signal* one hundred years ago shows public interest in their cemetery: Two ladies of Ventura, Mrs. A. J. Snodgrass and Mrs. Charles Bergstrom, have taken on themselves the great task of getting money which will be used to put our cemetery on the hill in decent condition. They deserve credit for doing something that should have been done long ago by the town. We should all take a great interest in seeing to it that the last resting place of our relatives and friends is properly cared for. Our cemetery has long been like a wild field, overgrown with mustard. A vote of thanks to these ladies who, unaided, have shown a spirit in their enterprise that others would do well to emulate.[9]]

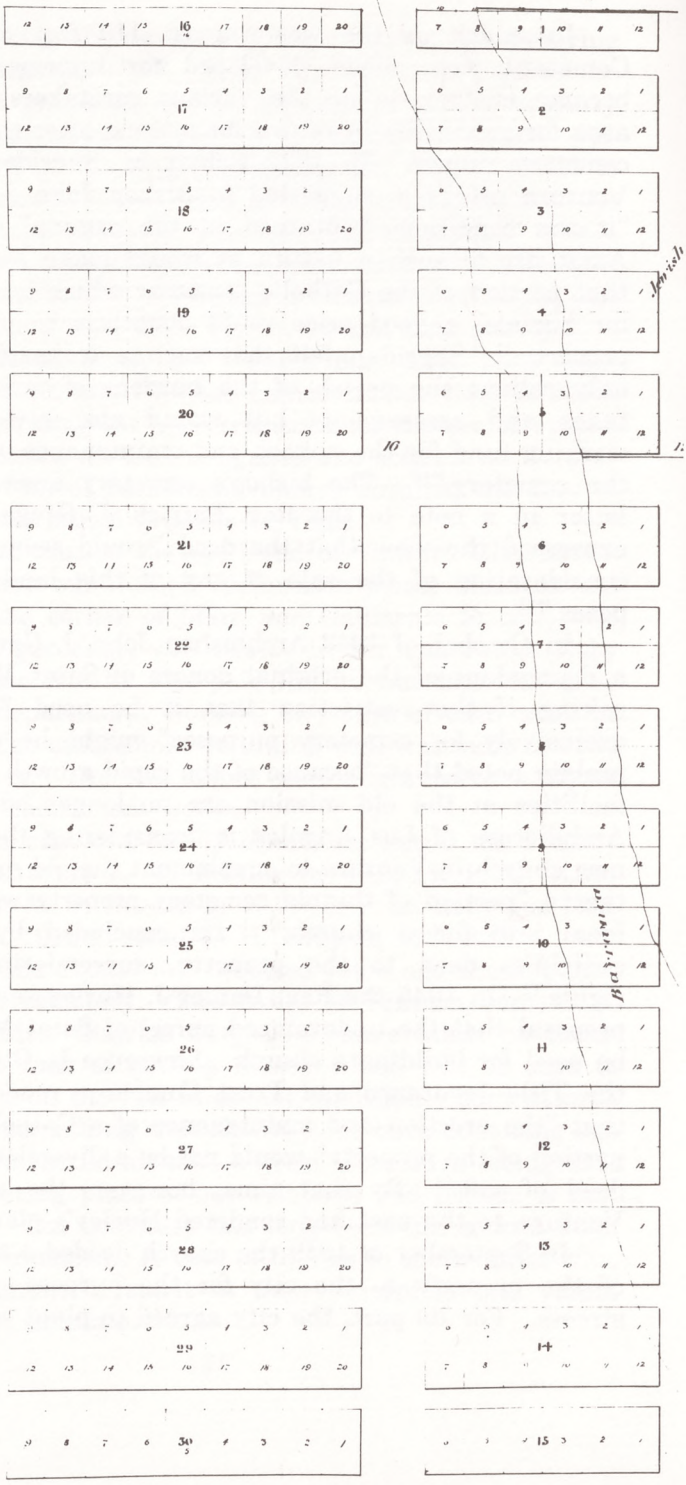
Inasmuch as the westernmost 110 feet of Saint Mary's Cemetery were never developed for interment purposes, it became customary for the various caretakers to utilize that area for gardening in return for looking after the graves in the cemetery proper. In 1922 Robert M. Sheridan, a prominent Ventura attorney, suggested to Bishop John J. Cantwell that "if the conditions contained in the original deed to Bishop Amat are of such a nature as would make possible a sale of that portion of the Catholic cemetery which has not been used for burials, a good price could doubtless be obtained for the property." Sheridan felt that such a transaction would "not only relieve the parish of the burdens of present and future taxes and assessments but would also give the parish a working fund for the upkeep and maintenance of the balance of the cemetery."[10] The bishop's secretary answered Sheridan's letter in a note to the Rev. Patrick J. Grogan, in which he expressed the view that the deed "would seem to prevent the consideration of the sale of any of this land for other purposes."[11]

In October of 1943 Archbishop John J. Cantwell contacted a descendant of the original donors of Saint Mary's Cemetery asking if the restriction that it be used "in its entirety exclusively for cemetery purposes" might be rescinded. The prelate noted that "because of the rapid growth of Ventura, the facilities at the old mission are no longer adequate and the Archdiocese of Los Angeles is "considering the building of a new church in Ventura to supplement the old mission." He felt that a "portion of the old cemetery property would provide an ideal site for a church." He concluded by asking for a quitclaim deed to the property, surrendering reversionary rights.[12] In 1945 the Rev. Daniel J. Hurley revived the earlier proposal that the undeveloped parcel of Saint Mary's Cemetery be used for building a church. Lawrence L. Otis, a counsel for the Title Insurance and Trust Company, rendered an opinion that "the erection and maintenance of a Catholic Church on a portion of the property" would not be a diversion of the original deed of gift.[13] By that time, however, the rapid growth of Ventura to the east had rendered Hurley's plan obsolete.

In September of 1949 the church deeded a ten foot frontage of the property to the city for the purpose of widening the streets. For its part, the city agreed to plant some hedges and

POLI VENTURA

CATHOLIC CEMETERY



CEMETERY

STREET

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Recorded at the Request of J. F. Yearly June 7. 1889 at 15 minutes past 10 A. M. W. H. Jewett Recorder

CEMETERY LOT

CITY OF SAN BUENAVENTURA

to

Jacklin Willett

DEED

Dated Sept 23rd *, 1911*

Recorded at the request of

Jacklin Willett

Sept 27 *, 1911*

at 15 *minutes past* 3 *o'clock*

P *M., in Book* 1 *of Deeds,*

of Cemetery Lots, page 32

City Clerk

Recorder

Block 1 ... on the Ventura Cemetery ... per the official Map thereof, recorded June 7th, 1889, in Book 3, of Miscellaneous Records, page 21, Records of Ventura County. This Conveyance is made upon the following conditions:

FIRST: That said lot shall be used for the purpose only of burial of the dead.

SECOND: That it shall not be alienated.

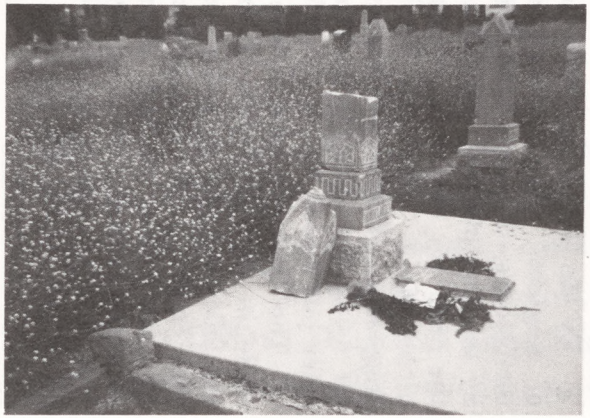
THIRD: That the party of the second part shall ... all things ... and conform to the ...les,

install water lines.[14] On December 9, 1952 the Recreation Commission for the city outlined a "long-term plan for the development of a centrally-located site for a Social-Cultural Recreation center" on the unused parcel of Saint Mary's Cemetery.[15] The following fall, the city completed arrangements to purchase the 110 feet from the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, with the understanding that it be used for recreational purposes. A check for $15,000 was drawn to James Francis Cardinal McIntyre on July 8, 1954 "in settlement of the condemnation action by the city of San Buenaventura for part of the old cemetery property."[16] It was further agreed that the city would assume responsibility for any general maintenance work in the Roman Catholic portion of the cemetery, for which the cost would be borne by the church.

Prior to 1917, Saint Mary's and its continguous graveyard were the only burial area for the city and its environs. In October of that year George E. Hume and a group of developers[17] opened Ivy Lawn Cemetery, a factor that contributed to the diminishing use and importance of the older location. Although Ivy Lawn has always been privately owned and operated, provisions were made for Roman Catholic interments, a practice that perdured for many years. And in 1965 the parochial cemetery of Santa Clara was expanded to provide for burials of non-Oxnard inhabitants.

By the end of the 1930's the cemetery had become an object of neglect: weed-choked and cluttered with shattered tombstones, the area needed attention. A proposal was made by the city planning commission in December 1938 to convert the cemetery into a public park. Besides installing sidewalks along Main Street, no further action was taken on the suggestion. Eleven years later it authorized a feasibility study for using the property for multiple housing, a plan that was later put aside.

The final interments were made in 1943; one burial was made in each graveyard in January and March. In May of the following year an ordinance was passed prohibiting any further burials.[18] By law, a cemetery becomes legally abandoned five years after the last interment. The exact number of interments between 1862 and 1943 cannot be determined, mainly because a number of remains were subsequently removed to Ivy Lawn and other cemeteries. An approximation would read:



Graves

in

1964

2,126 Protestants, 806 Roman Catholics and 48 Jews; a total of 2,980.

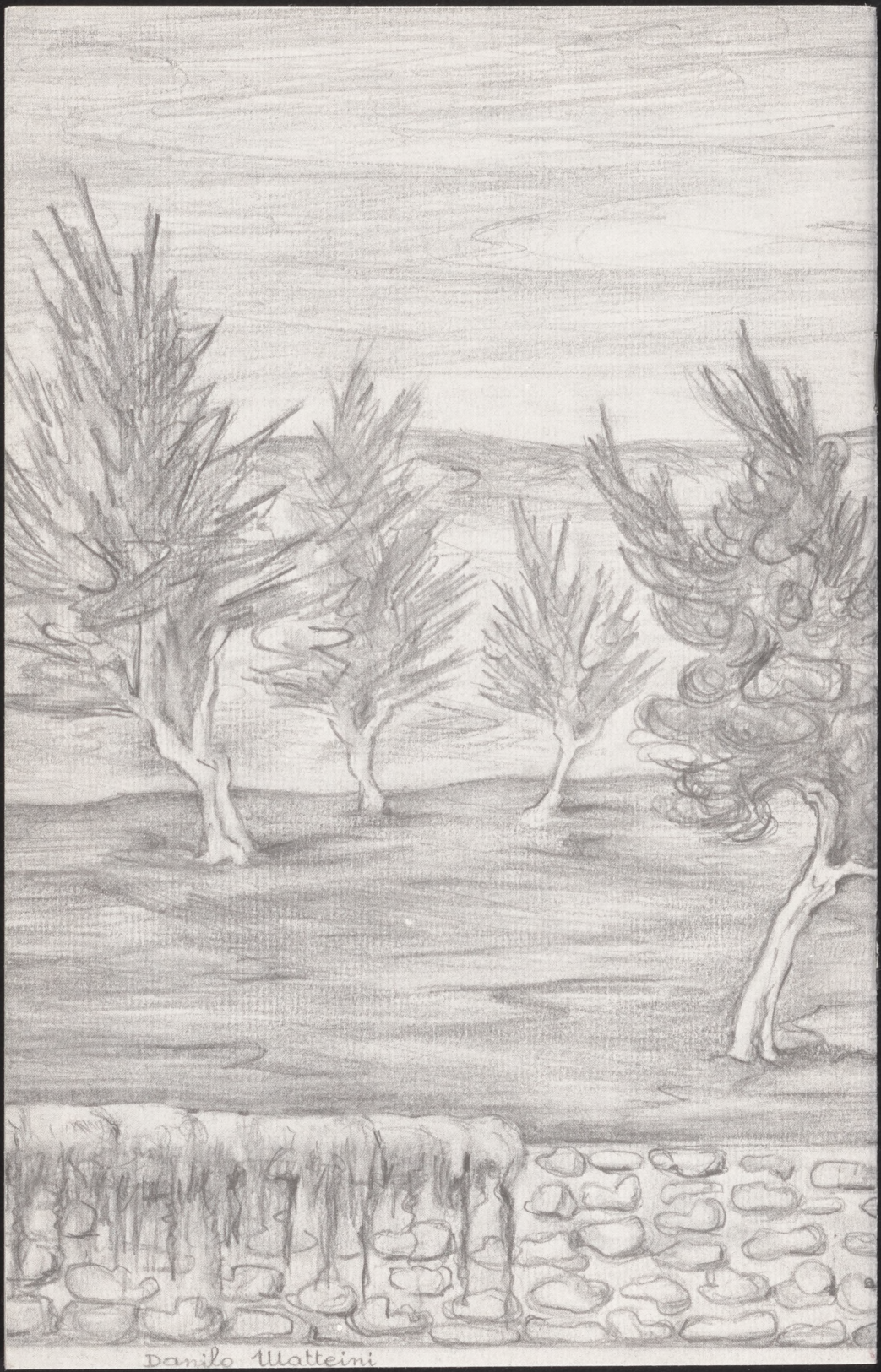
In 1963 the City of Ventura adopted a plan drafted by Charles Reiman calling for removal of curbs, slabs, vaults, headstones and bases. The Rev. Aubrey O'Reilly, Pastor of San Buenaventura Mission, suggested that small brass markers be set flush with the ground, with numbers keyed to a large monument whereon all the interments were enumerated. Letters were sent to heirs of all those buried in the tripartite cemetery, announcing the city's intention of removing the headstones and converting the cemetery into a park. Families wishing to claim the approximately 600 headstones were told they could pick them up in Hall Canyon where they had been carefully stored, in alphabetical order, just inside a workyard operated by the Parks Department. After seven years they were taken to the Olivas Golf Course levee and buried in rubble. Only six bodies were actually moved, all of them originally interred above ground in lawn crypts; the remains were re-casketed and then buried directly beneath the earlier crypts. Eleven graves have been marked at the request of their descendants.

There were, of course, objections to the idea. For example, Mrs. Donald Lindsay was "quite horrified" at the whole concept; she maintained that the cemetery should be preserved "as an historical landmark" rather than dismantled and converted to a park area.[19] Others quite vociferously favored the program. Helen Emily Webster was "delighted with the plans now being carried forward". She noted that it was "gratifying to know that the space will remain an open greenbelt in the midst of the lively building activity in this part of the city."[20] Calm minds prevailed and the historic graveyard is now a beautiful memorial area overlooking the Pacific Ocean and the Channel Islands. Covered by trees, shrubs and thick lawns, the old cemetery has become a monument to those of earlier generations.

Cemetery Park

NOTES TO THE TEXT

1. Santa Barbara Co., *Deeds,* A, 393.
2. *Libro de difuntos,* II (1824-1912) 1215.
3. *Plot book for Saint Mary's Cemetery, San Buenaventura, California* (1882-1921) in the Archives of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles (AALA).
4. *Libro de difuntos,* II (1824-1912) 1627.
5. First Presbyterian Church. Board of Trustees. *Minutes,* 1869-1883.
6. Zelma W. Wilcox, *Ventura-city-cemetery record* (1966) 36.
7. *Op. cit.,* First Presbyterian Church.
8. *Ventura County directory,* 1896—.
9. March 27, 1880.
10. April 20 (AALA).
11. John J. Devlin on April 25, 1922 (AALA).
12. 21st (AALA).
13. To Ralph J. Bailey, Nov. 5, 1945 (AALA).
14. Daniel J. Hurley to James Francis Cardinal McIntyre, Sept. 24, 1949 (AALA).
15. Thor O. Olson to Robert M. Sheridan, Dec. 9, 1952 (AALA).
16. Memo to James Francis Cardinal McIntyre, July 8, 1954 (AALA).
17. Others were Edgar Carne, David Darling and Joseph McGrath.
18. San Buenaventura, *Ordinances,* 600.
19. *Star-Free press,* Dec. 3, 1964.
20. *Ibid.,* Dec. 20, 1964.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